

The Biblical Case for Spiritual Equality for Gay People

1. Warm up: Think back over the years and tell us about the first gay person you ever met. How was that person treated by others, and what impressions about gay people did you draw from knowing them?
2. If you grew up in church, what did your church teach about gay people – and how did that affect you? If you didn't grow up in church, what messages did you get from others about gay people – and how did that affect you?
3. Why do you think conservative churches have such a negative stereotype of gay people?
4. On Sunday, we explored two great Gospel passages that have revolutionary significance for gay people. The first passage tells about a miraculous healing. Read Matthew 8:5-13, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Greek. In what we just read, we showed the original Greek word used to refer to the sick man where it appears in the text. The word is *pais*, pronounced pay-ESE. *Pais* was the most common term of endearment used in ancient Greek literature and poetry to refer to one's gay partner. When you heard that the centurion used that exact term when talking to Jesus about the sick man, what was your internal reaction?
 - b. *Pais* is a term that can have several different meanings depending on the context in which it's used. It's roughly equivalent to the English word "boy." Thus, *pais* could be used to refer to a male child. It was also used to refer to male servants, kind of like in the old South when full-grown males slaves would often – unfortunately – be referred to as boys. And, as we've seen, *pais* was also used as a term of endearment when one man referred to another who was his partner or lover. *Pais* was also often used in a way that combined the second and third meanings. In other words, it could be used to refer to a servant who was also his master's male lover, a practice that historians tell us was not uncommon among commanders in the Roman army. The idea that someone might own someone else and compel a relationship with them is outrageous to us today, but we also know that ancient marriage involved a man bargaining for and owning a woman. How often do you think these ancient arranged marriages – whether straight or gay – resulted in genuine mutual love? Do you think modern courtship is better than ancient arranged marriages? Why or why not?
 - c. Jeff suggested that all of the available linguistic, textual, and circumstantial evidence embedded in Matthew's story points in the direction of the sick man being the centurion's male partner. In Luke's telling of the same story, his language makes clear that the sick person was not the centurion's son. Luke refers to the sick person as both *pais* and *doulos*. *Doulos* was never used to refer to a son and only refers to a servant. But when Luke uses *doulos*, he modifies the word with *entimos*, which means special. In other words, the sick man was a

servant who had a special relationship with the centurion. In both accounts, the centurion himself consistently uses only one word for the sick man, *pais*, and refers to his other ordinary servants with a different term. Beyond the linguistic and textual evidence, the passage also contains powerful circumstantial and psychological evidence, i.e., a powerful Gentile centurion crashes through all kinds of barriers of religion, class, culture, and power to plead with a Jewish rabbi (Jesus) to heal the sick man. The oppressor comes to the oppressed; the unbeliever comes to the Teacher. The Gentile comes to the Jew. In your view, what does all this suggest about the relationship between the centurion and the sick man? What can explain why the centurion went to such extraordinary lengths to seek healing for his *pais*?

5. With all the foregoing as background, let's picture how the story unfolded.
 - a. How do you imagine the centurion felt as he approached Jesus before a word was spoken?
 - b. How do you imagine he felt when Jesus said, "I will come and cure him?"
 - c. How do you imagine the Jews who witnessed all this felt?
 - d. Jesus said the centurion had greater faith than anyone he had ever encountered among his own people. What's the significance of that?
 - e. Look again at verses 10-12. What is the significance of these words for the centurion and his eternal fate?

6. In our second Gospel passage, Jesus got into a debate with the Pharisees and, in the process, rejected the Old Testament theology that led to certain animals and people being declared "unclean." Read Mark 7:1-8 and 14-23, as printed on pp. 3-4.
 - a. The Old Testament declares many animals to be "unclean" and therefore an "abomination" to eat. The Mercer Bible dictionary says, "Among the animals of Leviticus 11, the unclean are those of mixed or confused identity: if for example birds typically fly and quadrupeds walk, a quadruped that flies – the bat (vs. 19) – is perceived as having a confused identity; it is unclean. The birds listed as unclean swim or dive or in some other way do not behave like birds. . . . The principle is clear: the animal perceived as 'ordered' has its holiness and is clean; the animal having blurred identity is contaminated and to be avoided." This same concept was applied to people. This way of thinking is called "Creation Order Theology," which many conservatives apply today to gay people. The logic goes like this:
 - o Quadrupeds were meant to walk, not fly.
 - o Bats are quadrupeds that fly.
 - o Ergo: Bats are unnatural and unholy.

- o Similarly, women were meant to love men, not other women.
- o Lesbians love other women.
- o Ergo: Lesbians are unnatural and unholy.

What's wrong with this way of thinking? What's the fallacy?

- b. Read again what Jesus says in verses 17-23 of Mark 7. According to Jesus, what determines whether a person is (or isn't) right with God?
 - c. Based on what Jesus says, does it make sense to say that the physical anatomy (i.e., gender) of the person you love can defile you and affect your relationship with God? Why or why not?
7. Which of the two Gospel stories we've discussed today strikes you as most powerful – and why?

Matthew 8:5-13

5 When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him ⁶and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.' ⁷And he said to him, 'I will come and cure him.' ⁸The centurion answered, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this", and the slave does it.' ¹⁰When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹²while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹³And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.' And the servant was healed in that hour.

Mark 7:1-8 and 14-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, ²they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴and they do not eat anything from the market unless they

wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' ⁶He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

"This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines."

⁸You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition. . . .'

¹⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.'

¹⁷ When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, ¹⁹since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' Thus he declared all foods clean.

²⁰And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. ²¹For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²²adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'